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Survivor

Only One Year

by Svetlana Alliluyeva,
translated by Paul Chavchvadze.
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by Jean Stafford

"Oh, those ever-changing moods of Moscow! How swiftly they go from black to white, from one extreme to another, from friendship to accusa-

deputies and there to consign her husband's ashes to the Ganges where it flowed beside his native ground.

She had been told that she could make the journey, then told she could not, then, when she reached a fury of frustration, she was permitted, after all, to go: even so, at the eleventh hour, there was a change of schedule and a further maddening, needless delay. The watchdogs did not reckon on her purpose; her resolve not to go back home began to evolve in hot,

"Modesty embellishes a Bolshevik," her father said to her once, and while he was speaking of dress and domestic deportment and was using the word as synonymous with "humility" or "acquiescence," she may have learned a lasting lesson from the epigram. For she is wholly modest.

It might be argued that she acquired this virtue as a reaction against the arrogance and cynicism of her father and his votaries, or that she came by it when her godliness set in, but in either of those events, she would have consciously assumed a role and the modesty would be false; hers is not: it has its genesis in an intrinsic wholeness, an *amour propre* which has made her impregnable to the disasters of vulgarity or vainglory. It is a miracle that she has preserved her innocence despite a life-long fare of holocaust and hokum, of chaos and manipulation and madness and massacre. She loves the kingdom of God and she hates the USSR (the very thought of Beria brings on something close to delirium), but she does not try to recruit immigrants to the one or emigrants from the other; her nerves are still raw but her heart is simple.

One is obliged to catalogue and insist upon her moral accomplishment because her testament is, at first reading, uncomfortably embarrassing; the writing is so flaccid and unprofessional that there is no tension in the complex and raging and dramatic episodes of her narrative: the reader does not sit on the edge of his chair and wonder, "Will she get out of Russia?" "Will she make the plane from Delhi to Rome without being seen?" "Will she find asylum in America?" To be sure, she lays no claim to being a writer and the facts in her case are so much in the public domain that perhaps nothing short of a work of fiction would enliven them to my taste. However, neither did Charles Lindbergh set himself up as a writer, and yet when I read *The Spirit of St. Louis*, although I knew that the author was alive and well in Darien, Connecticut and had been for many years, I flew the Atlantic in an agony of suspense and was at no time sure that we were going to come in for a safe landing at Le Bourget.



tions, from adoration to hatred, from the permissive 'da' to that annihilating 'nyet.' Those eternal swings from a thaw to a freeze, whims that disregard their own rules, norms, and regulations! Unhappy land, unhappy people, who instead of promised freedoms got nothing but whims—whims far worse than those of any emperor..." So writes Svetlana recalling the bureaucratic snarls that entangled her in Delhi when she was trying to leave the city for a countryside distant from Soviet

dirty Kalakankar in the heart of India. Because she is inalienably Russian herself (although her international and interdenominational God persuades her that in a larger sense she is a citizen of the world) she is as mercurial as Moscow personified and in this troubled, valorous, disjointed, touching memoir, her register shifts to accommodate her repertoire of lamentation, diatribe, carol of joy, and paean of thanksgiving. She is fidgety and voluble, she is winsome, she is austere.